

# Love, Autonomy and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

The difficulty most commonly expressed by prospective patients, at the initial consultation with an A.P.E.L. therapist, concerns their inability to make a satisfying, deep and loving relationship with anyone else. Although they may be involved in a relationship they may experience it as cold and distant or irritable and the couple never really feel the 'other' is there for them when things feel difficult.

A psychoanalytic psychotherapist (PP therapist) offers their patient a relationship for an (usually) open ended period of time. This is a particular sort of relationship and in time many of the difficult feelings which occur in the outside world begin to crop up in the consulting room. This makes it possible for the therapist and the patient to experience together what is happening in other relationships and to understand why. **This is the point when change becomes possible – when difficult feelings can be understood and managed in a thoughtful way rather than just being acted on, possibly destructively.**

Emotional difficulties often relate to unconscious thoughts and feelings derived from earlier experiences. It is as if we have an internal mother, father or siblings who constantly pop up into our minds as if they have become reincarnated into our current lives, disguised as friends, lovers or colleagues. These internal figures may not be accurate representations of actual people from a patient's past life. Patients often experience their therapist as an agreeable or disagreeable mother or father and they may have powerful feelings about this.

**Autonomy means having the freedom to determine your own behaviour and choices.**

Psychoanalytic psychotherapists are interested in helping patients to develop their capacity to feel quietly confident about their own independent behaviour and decisions and to use their feelings and thoughts as helpful guides in their lives. Autonomy is impossible with a mind dominated and controlled by internal figures making a noise, trying to influence your every thought and feeling.

**In order for autonomy to become possible PP therapists believe that it is necessary for the patient and therapist to develop a relationship over time.**

It is not possible to do this work in 8 sessions – because the difficult feelings do not surface in a relationship that is due to finish almost as soon as it has started. PP therapists also believe that patients need to get to know their own autonomy in the sessions with the therapist. This is one reason why the therapist will not set the agenda for the session; they will wait and see what the patient wants to bring to the session; and they will not tell the patient what

they 'ought' to think or feel. They will not set 'homework' – it is up to the patient to choose whether to think about the session afterwards. This leaves the way open for the patient to show the therapist what they really think and feel, not what they think the therapist wants to hear.

When the patient reaches the truth about themselves and can think about and understand it with the therapist, they are better equipped to be in an intimate relationship with a partner without a fear of losing their sense of self and feeling dominated by the other person or the figures in their internal world. When the patient can look at their partner without a lot of noise starting up in their mind, which does not belong to the relationship, intimacy may feel safe and rewarding. This is sometimes a source of great joy to patients.